

The Dolphins' Cold and Wet Heritage

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By Kevin Wallace

How free and fine to have been an aboriginal San Franciscan, splashing in the waters of Yerba Buena cove and North Beach, before commerce smothered them under docking and industrial impedimenta.

How nice — if Bay waters were 20 degrees warmer than they are.

Still, a few strange San Franciscans have always been fond of turning on by swimming at the western extremity of the original North Beach — thereby preserving its sands from commercial engulfment, to survive as today's Aquatic Park.

One of the strand's cold-water addicts yesterday explained the unusual habit in one of its habitats, the 97-year-old Dolphin Swimming and Rowing Club:

"Once you get used to cold water swimming, you can't give it up without experiencing a wrenching agony," said Bill Walden, cheerfully. He meant 45-to-59-degree water.

"Even if it almost kills you — like the three-hour swim back over here from Fort Point — it pacifies you. You stagger into the hot shower and you don't give a damn about anything. You just feel great, which you don't at the sweaty end of a three-hour run."

Sweaty three-hour runs, rowboat workouts, and handball tournaments are also common among Aquatic Park Dolphins, who — unlike Miami and Marine World dolphins — tend to go on into their nineties, turning gradually a deeper Polynesian orange in the sun, until they shrivel up and dis-

appear. Pacified, and feeling great.

Walden, an engineer, is a child of 53. He was surrounded on the club's afterdeck by the usual lunch-hour crowd, several of them 68 or pushing 68 — the longshoreman Joe Carroll, travel writer Robin Kinkead, produce district veteran Dino Landucci, and Ed De Cossio, who rows to Sacramento and back annually — presided over by the PG&E computer pioneer Lawton Hughes, 74.

The older boys had had their dip and gone home — Wally Smith and Bill People, for instance, and Hank Willinger, who hadn't far to go, since he lives in the octagonal turret apartment on top of the club's pleasant Victorian frame seashore villa.

Dr. Abraham Ward had gone altogether. Last year, at 93, he took his last ride aboard the club's 42-foot six-car-and-cox'n rowing barge — the John Wieland, named in 1887 for the late beer baron, a charter member — and went home and died. Feeling fine.

Walter (Iron Man) Stack, the hodcarrier who likes to run in the 26-mile Pike's Peak and Boston marathons — but who is only 66 — was off on his regular sprint to Sausalito and back, prior to his coldwater 100-yard dip.

Back in 1877 — when the present site was dominated by Neptune Baths and Fanny Annie's — some land-weary German turnverreiners chartered the club at the foot of Beach Street. Landfill and commerce first chased it west a few blocks along the beach, and then, in 1895, all the way to the foot of Van Ness Avenue.



By Peter Breinig

Dolphin Club members waded stoically into the cold waters of San Francisco Bay convinced this is the best and only way to exercise.

The clubhouse couldn't quite make it, and collapsed en route. The present building was moved from the foot of Van Ness to the foot of Polk street in 1925, and to its present resting place, a block and a half east, in 1938.

There it settled between the lateborn South End Rowing Club, which wasn't chartered until 1878, and the Ariel (now the San Francisco) Rowing Club, older (1872) but smaller, both of which had also been drifting from strand to strand.

Both independently and in league with the South Enders, the Dolphins sponsor swimming events that to non-coldwater types sound very peculiar as a rule.

Among their standard freakouts is a mass swim-in from Alcatraz. Odd, really odd, members like to swim in from the Farallones, and

sometimes do. Fog and sudden gales whet their interest. Storms incite them.

This Sunday at noon the two clubs will sponsor an Invitational Aquatic Park Cove Swim — a mile around a course inside the blood-freezing blue lagoon (59 degrees; 45 in winter) followed by lunch.

A dozen or more rowing barges occupy the boat room, and 15 racing shells are housed out at Lake Merced. National championship handball tournaments occur on the club's second floor, which also houses two real dolphins, stuffed, sent in by admirers.

The runners' mile-and-a-third course is to the end of municipal pier and back, the two mile course is through Fort Mason and back.

In times of earthquake and fire — 1906 for instance — refugees are put up in the club.

To suit the widely-ranging whims of cold-water swimmers, the club's facilities open at 4 a.m. and close around 11 p.m.

In short, the club lives up to the terms set forth in its 1877 charter, adapted over the years to suit such changes as the passage of beach title from the State to the City's Recreation and Park Departments.

Adaptation of these terms is a kind of informal family matter. No cent is charged. And though the club doesn't own its strand, it pays taxes on it. The charter allows only 300 members, so there is always at least a small waiting list. Dues are only \$7 a year, and go to mainte-

nance of the old building.

Bill Walden acknowledges that jealous eyes are sometimes cast on the club row as a cheerful anachronism in the high-priced commercial neighborhood, but he relies on family sentiment to sustain the charter.

He notes, "Every other household in San Francisco recalls at least one uncle or cousin who was a member."

And, snug ashore in their windbreakers, feel a swell of vicarious pride in them.

Indiana Grid Stars Charged

Bloomington, Ind.

Indiana University football stars Willie Jones and Maurice Osborne were arrested yesterday on drug-related charges.

Associated Press

